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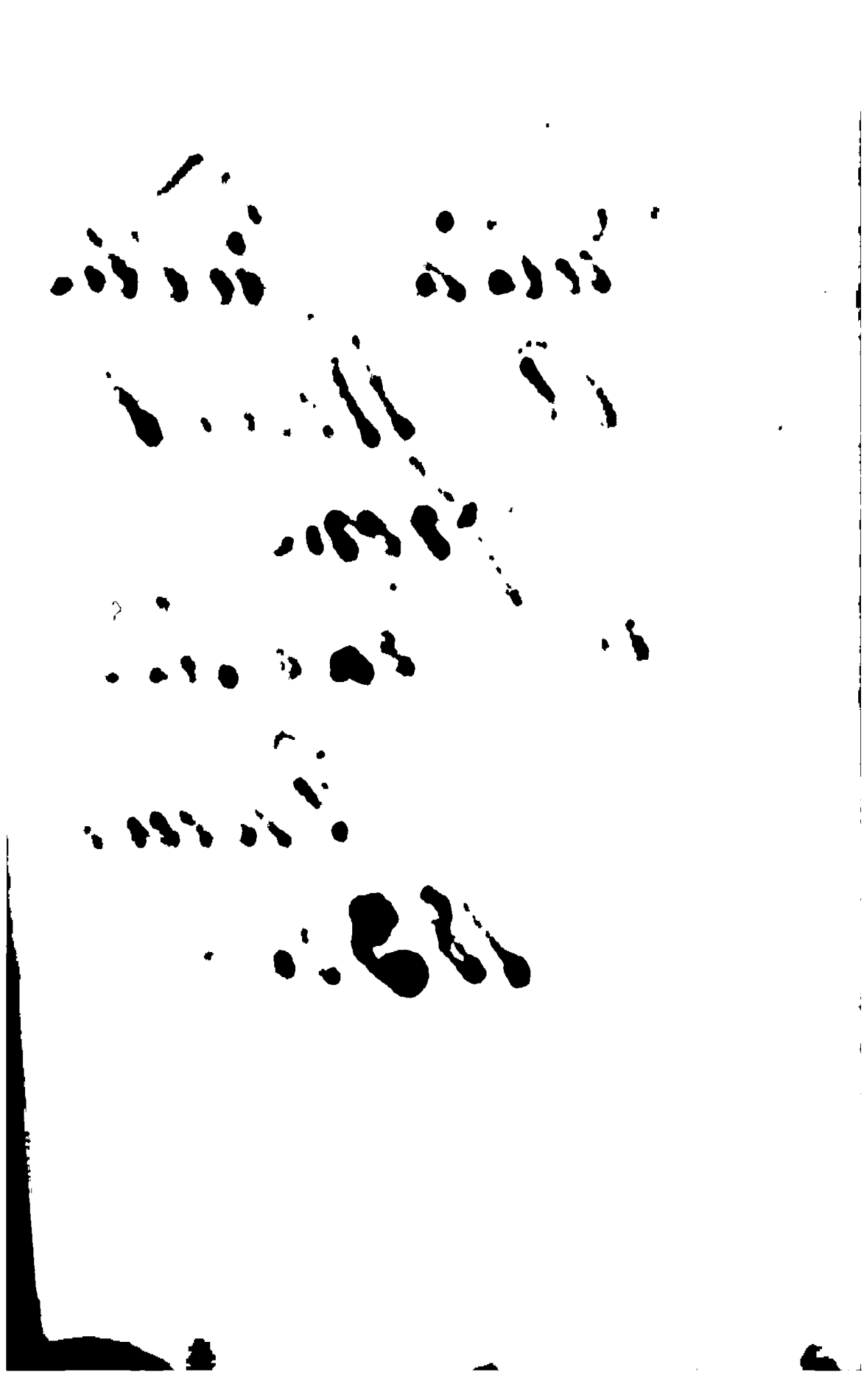

SELF-DISCIPLINE.

SELF-DISCIPLINE.

BY

HENRY FORSTER BURDER, D. D.

"If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live."

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THE contents of the following pages are not now submitted to the public for the first time. They have appeared as a part of a larger work, entitled, "The Essentials of Religion, Personal, Domestic, and Social." As the subjects now selected are sufficiently distinct and transcendantly important, the Author has ventured to present them to the public in a detached form, which, it is presumed, may

bring them within the reach of a greater number of readers, particularly among the young.

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SELF-DISCIPLINE.

I.

THE GOVERNMENT OF THE DESIRES.

Delight thyself in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Ps. 37. 4.

The desires of the heart, comprise all those varieties of emotion, which connect the thoughts of the mind with the actions of the life. They are susceptible of numberless gradations of strength, from the incipient tendency, of which the mind is scarcely conscious, to the resistless impetuosity of passion.

Our passions themselves, even when excited to the utmost intensity, are only the desires of the heart, under another name; for "desires rise into passions whenever they are vivid, whenever they are permanent." It is, then, to a subject, by no means wanting in importance or interest, that I would now direct your attention: it is to that Government of the Desires which is essential to personal sanctity. Let me endeavor to place before you, both the Inducements by which we should be urged to the attempt, and the Principles by which that attempt should be regulated.

Let our attention be given,

First, To the Inducements by which we should be effectually urged

to aim at the due Government of our Desires.

First, Consider how much of our mental existence is spent in giving exercise, and indulgence, to the desires of the heart.

Consider how many of the thoughts and feelings of every day move on in the channel of wishes and hopes and expectations. And what are all these movements of the mind but certain modifications of desire? What is a wish but a feeble and idle desire—an indolent aspiration after something which we deem desirable, but which we have no reason to regard as actually attainable? And what is hope—that balm of life—that medicine of the soul—but the encourage-

ment given to desire, under a strong probability of the attainment of the object? And what is expectation, but the cheering confidence of hope, when the strength of probability, rising still higher, makes apparently a near approach to certainty itself? If, then, these states of mind, which make up so large a part of our daily consciousness, are so many gradations of desire, how evident is it, that on the due regulation of our desires, the happiness of life must depend! And could human life be happy, were it possible to effect an entire suppression of these longings, after some object, not yet attained,—this "reaching forth to the things of futurity? Could this be effected, even for a single hour, there

would be during that dreary interval a perfect stagnation of the feelings, a paralysis of the inner man, a death-like torpor of soul. On the other hand, it is equally impossible to be happy, if the desires attain an impetuosity which spurns control, or go forth with eagerness after objects which deserve not the energy of the mind. Is that man happy, whose desires are unreasonable, and extravagant, and intemperate? On the contrary, is not he alone pursuing the path of happiness, who is ever on his guard against the ascendency of desires, which are either in themselves unjustifiable, or calculated to issue in disappointment?

Secondly, Consider how many of the

most fearful evils of life may be traced to ill-regulated desires.

What is the history of the origin of evil, and the entrance of misery into the world we inhabit? Examine the record of the first temptation, and the first transgression. The fruit forbidden by God was *represented* as desirable, and was *regarded* as desirable. The desire thus entertained, gathering strength by indulgence, at length impelled to the daring and rebellious act. "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree *to be desired* to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat." Thus did the desire of that

which was forbidden bring "death into the world, and all our woe."

And is not the history of the first temptation, and the first offence, the embryo-history of all temptations and of all iniquities? The rising and the strengthening desire of that which is interdicted, is itself evil; and criminal, in a still higher degree, is the action in which the desire terminates. An illustration of the tendency of such desires may be derived from the emphatic assertion of the Apostle Paul, in reference to a principle of action, than which scarcely any one of mightier operation is to be found in the heart of man. It is the desire of gain. "We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can

carry nothing out. Wherefore, having food and raiment, let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil; which, while some have coveted after, (or *eagerly desired*,) they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." Who can describe the agonizing stings which have been infixed in the conscience, and the envenomed darts which have pierced the soul of many a man, whose God was Mammon, and whose ruling passion was the love of gold! The captive that digs in the mine, and the slave that is chained

to the galley, are not condemned to baser toil, than the man who, at all hazards both of soul and body, "*will* be rich." He shares their labor, but not their repose. They have no part in his gains, but neither have they any part in the agonies of his guilt. And which of all the unhallowed desires that have place in the depraved heart of man, would not justify a representation, bearing some resemblance to the forcible and vivid statement of the Apostle? Every one of them is in its nature restless, and disquieting, and tormenting. If it gain ascendency, without obtaining indulgence, its wretched victim is reduced to the situation of one who suffers torture by the infliction of another; if it grasp the object at the

expense of conscience, its victim is doomed to the still more agonizing torture which is self-inflicted. What then must be the gnawing of "the worm that dieth not," in the world unvisited by hope!

But let it be supposed, that the desires of the heart impel not to any course of action which conscience loudly condemns. Let it be supposed, that there is even a semblance of correctness in their character, so that no object is pursued or desired which the law of God appears absolutely to forbid. Still, if happiness be desired and expected from sources of merely earth-born pleasure, assuredly the pursuit must terminate in the pangs of most pitiable disappointment. Thus

it was even with Solomon himself, on completing the grand experiment, by which may be ascertained the extent to which the things of this world can contribute to the satisfaction of the desires of the heart. Hear his own spontaneous confession, which he was directed to record, for the instruction and the warning of every succeeding age:— "I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards; I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kinds of fruits:— I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces; I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts:—and *whatsoever*

mine eyes desired I kept not from them ; I withheld not my heart from any joy. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labor that I had labored to do ; and, behold all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun." There was an adaptation in many of these things to impart *a certain degree* of blameless pleasure, and innocent delight; but he had calculated upon a result of *supreme satisfaction*, instead of subordinate enjoyment; and such was the consequent bitterness of soul, arising from disappointed hopes, that in the very zenith of his prosperity, he added,—" therefore I hated life."

Thirdly, Consider how much importance is attached to the character

of our desires by Him who searcheth the heart.

Brief as is the compendium of moral duty contained in the decalogue, one of the ten commandments aims expressly at the right regulation of the desires. "Thou shalt not covet" was one of the prohibitory mandates written, by the finger of God, upon the tablets of stone, and designed to be written on the more susceptible tablet of the heart. It was as if Jehovah had said,—"Not only shalt thou abstain from *taking* that which is not thine own, but thou shalt abstain also from *desiring* that which is not thine own." And it is deserving of remark that it was this very command, which conveyed to the Apostle Paul a clearer

view of the extensive and spiritual requirements of the divine law, than he had derived from all its other precepts. "I had not known sin," said he, "but by the law:"—"for *strong desire* I had not known to be sin unless the law had said, Thou shalt not covet."* Has the holy law been understood and applied by *us* in all this latitude of meaning? If we are indeed aware of the nature of the obedience which it demands, oh, what materials of self-condemnation must we find in the retrospect of every day! What profound ignorance should we betray, both of ourselves and of the law which is just and holy, were we to flatter ourselves with the delusive notion of some innate or habitual

* Macnight's Translation.

goodness of heart! If, in the sight of God, evil desire, of every gradation, is a sin which deserves his anger, what need have we to flee for refuge to Him who came into the world to save sinners, "lest we perish from the way, even when his wrath is kindled but a little."

Nor let it escape our remembrance, that the righteous Judge takes cognizance, not only of desires positively evil, but also of the absence of such as he justly requires us to cherish. A characteristic description of the wicked, is contained in these few words:—"They say to God, Depart from us for we *desire not* the knowledge of thy ways:—what is the Almighty that we should serve him; and what

profit is there if we pray unto him?" Is it possible for human language to be more expressive of criminal alienation of spirit, and of a state of heart at enmity against God? Equally decisive of a state of heart "right with God," are many strains of expression which indicate the character of the prevailing desires. "Whom have I in heaven but thee," said the man after God's own heart, "and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee. My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever."—"The desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee."—"One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after;

that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple."

These considerations, then, it may be presumed, are sufficient to exhibit the urgency of the Inducements by which we should be impelled to aim at the right regulation of our desires.

Let me now direct your views,

SECONDLY, To the Principles by which our attempts should be regulated.

First, Let us have recourse to infallible guidance and influence.

Pitiably, uninstructed, are the moralizing guides, who have not derived their system, in all its entireness, from the volumes of revelation. An eloquent

lecturer on the Philosophy of the Human Mind has given the following enumeration of the desires which he deems natural and universal:—"A desire of continued existence, without any immediate regard to the pleasure which it may yield; a desire of pleasure, considered directly as mere pleasure; a desire of action; a desire of society; a desire of knowledge; a desire of power, direct, as in ambition, or indirect, as in avarice: a desire of the affection or esteem of those around us; a desire of glory; a desire of the happiness of others; and *a desire of the unhappiness of those whom we hate.*" The last of this specification is represented not only as having existence in the human mind, but as deriving origin

from the very Author of our being. "As the whole system of things is at present constituted," affirms Dr. Brown, "it is not of less importance, that man should be susceptible of *malevolence* on certain occasions, than that he should be susceptible of benevolence in the general concerns of life; and man, accordingly, is endowed with the susceptibility of both.—The desire of evil to others, is to be measured, in our moral estimates, by the nature of the brief or permanent hatred in which it may have originated; and is allowable, therefore, only in the cases in which the hatred is truly a feeling that is necessary in such circumstances for the protection of this social scene." But is malevolence, under any

circumstances, necessary, or is it salutary, or is it right? Can it be approved, can it have been implanted in our nature, by Him who made us, and who originally constituted our nature holy? Is such a desire justifiable by the letter or the spirit of any moral precept contained in the word of God, or by any interpretation of the divine law, given by our divine Master, or by his Apostles? The authority of heathen moralists might be pleaded in its favor, and the authority also of the Jewish Scribes and Elders: but what saith our Lord and Lawgiver? "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy; but I say unto you, Love your enemies; bless them

that curse you; do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father who is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.—Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father who is in heaven is perfect."

But is it sufficient for us simply to know what is right, "and what it is which God requireth of us?" This would be sufficient, were our hearts conformed, in every desire, to the holy law of God. But which of us has not need to say, with the most painful remembrance of past delinquencies, "Lord, have mercy upon

us, and incline our hearts to keep this law!" Even this inclination and desire, can have no permanent place, except in the heart renewed by the Spirit of God, "The carnal mind," affirms the Apostle Paul, "is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you." The state of unregeneracy, the Apostle represents as the condition in which men are habitually "fulfilling the desires of the flesh, and of the mind;" and he adds, the awakening representation of their being "by nature the children of wrath."—"If,'

adds the Apostle, "ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds (and consequently the *desires*) of the body, ye shall live." Who, then, really believing these statements, will not feel the indispensable necessity of the aid of the Holy Spirit, to sanctify and to regulate the desires of his heart? Who that knows human nature, and that knows himself, will think it possible to make any commencement, or any progress, in the arduous work of the right government of his desires, without the renovating influence of that grace, which can work in us, "both to will and to do" according to the good pleasure of our God?

Secondly, Let us cherish those

desires, which in their very indulgence will promote our happiness.

In order to this, what better directory can there be, than that which is given us in our text: "Delight thyself in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart?" What is the import of this comprehensive council? It is as if the inspired Psalmist had said: "Direct thy views and thy affections, to the Author of being and of blessedness. No longer employ thyself, in 'hewing out broken cisterns, which can hold no water;' but, resort with ardent desire and grateful delight, to 'the fountain of living water;' Delight and solace thyself, in the admiring contemplation of the chief good, and the chief joy of all who have discovered

the secret of happiness." And is there not to be found the highest delight in the manifestations of divine glory, and especially of divine love? Is there not delight in beholding the justice which governs the world, and the holiness which adorns the throne of Deity, blended with the mercy which "blotteth out transgressions," and "the love which passeth knowledge?" Surely there is delight ineffable in being authorized to say, "This God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death.—O God, I will praise thee: thou wast angry with me; but thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortest me. Behold, the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation!"

Cherish such delights as this; and its effect, in regulating the desires of the heart, will be equally powerful and salutary. It will induce a progressively ardent desire to discern more of "the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ;" to spend your days more constantly in the light of his countenance; and to attain higher qualifications for his service on earth, and for his immediate presence in heaven. Now, if in these desires themselves there are elements of true delight, so also will there be in the studies and the efforts and the prayers and the thanksgivings which they will dictate, and still more in the progressive attainment of the things desired. And in all this there is no danger of mortifying and heart-withering

disappointment. When we desire these things, and ask them at the throne of the heavenly grace, we desire and we ask according to the will of God; "and this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask any thing according to his will he heareth us, and if we know that he heareth us; whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him."

Thirdly, Let us cherish those desires which will most effectually repress and exclude the evil inclinations of the heart.

Delight thyself in the Lord, as thy chief good, and then thy prevailing desire will be to glorify thy God, by every affection of thy heart, and every

action of thy life. Delight thyself thus in the Lord, and thy most pleasurable desire and expectation for the future, will spring from the hope of seeing God, and of being forever with him. Thus wilt thou attain a spiritual mind, a heavenly temper, looking and aiming not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; remembering that the things which are seen are temporal, but that the things which are not seen are eternal. Thou wilt cultivate the desires and the affections of a pilgrim and a stranger upon earth, "desiring a better, that is, a heavenly country:" and rejoicing in "the hope of the inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that

fadeth not away." Realizing the presence of an invisible God, and the prospect of an invisible world, thy heart will be brought under the transforming influence of that faith which is "the confidence of things hoped for, and the conviction of things not seen." Actuated by this principle, thou wilt disentangle and divest thyself of every weight which would impede thy career, in running the race that is set before thee. Thus will thy conduct gradually approximate to that which, it may be presumed, would be the course of an angel's life, were one of the angels of heaven to become an incarnate inhabitant of earth; or rather it will bear a progressive resemblance to the course of life

actually exhibited by incarnate Deity, when the Word was made flesh and dwelt among men, full of grace and truth; being holy, harmless, and undefiled, and separate from sinners.

"The love of the world," it has been well observed, "cannot be expunged by a mere demonstration of the world's worthlessness. The heart cannot be prevailed upon to part with the world, by a simple act of resignation. If the throne which is placed there *must* have an occupier, and the tyrant that now reigns has occupied it wrongfully, he may *not* leave a bosom which would rather detain him, than be left in desolation. But may he not give way to the lawful sovereign, appearing with every charm

that can secure his willing admittance, and taking unto himself his great power to subdue the moral nature of man and to reign over it?—In this case there is something more than the mere displacement of an affection. There is the overbearing of one affection, by another. But to desolate his heart of all love for the things of the world, without the substitution of any love in its place, were to him a process of as unnatural violence, as to destroy all the things that he has in the world, and give him nothing in their room. So that if to love not the world be indispensable to one's Christianity, then the crucifixion of the old man is not too strong a term to mark that transition in his history, when all old

things are done away, and all things are become new."*

Lastly, Let the strength of our desires be proportioned to the real value of the object desired.

If, on this enlightened principle, our desires be regulated, we shall be placed beyond the danger of serious and overwhelming disappointment. If we delight supremely in God, and supremely desire his favor, then our desires of things, inferior in value, will be only of proportionate strength, and will be kept in due subordination. We shall not desire them as things essential to our happiness, but only as subsidiary. We shall desire them, only on the supposition of their being

* Dr. Chalmers.

agreeable to the will of Him in whom we place our felicity; so that could we ascertain that they were not, in his estimation, desirable for us, they would on that account cease to be objects of desire. We would be perfectly satisfied in the absence of that which it is not his will to bestow. "The very thing is even in this case done, which we should wish to be done." It accords with our heart's desire and prayer. We should be fully prepared to say to our Father in heaven;—"Lord, if thy wisdom, which is infinitely more than mine, see this thing to be not fit, deny me in this desire of mine."—And this general and habitual desire, which is the controller of every specific and oc-

casional desire, cannot fail to be accomplished in favor of the man who delights supremely in the Lord. He must, in the highest sense succeed in obtaining the desires of his heart.

Let it be considered also, that if our supreme desire centre in God, it may be perfectly compatible with our best interests, that many inferior and subordinate desires should be granted. *That* description or degree of earthly good is incompatible with our spiritual prosperity, which we are inclined to over-value, and to seek with undue intensity of desire. It then becomes necessary to our welfare, that such an object should be withheld, lest it should attract the homage and attachment of heart, due only to the blessed

God himself. But if it be desired only with the moderation and submissiveness of feeling which ought ever to be cherished by the Christian, it may be granted without injury to our best interests; and God may see fit to indulge this subordinate and well-regulated desire of the heart. It was, I conceived, with these views that the inspired Psalmist penned the words of the text, and of the other connected verses, which have reference to temporal as well as to spiritual blessings:—"Trust in the Lord and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the

Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass." His encouraging assurance appears to harmonize with that given, in still more explicit language, by our blessed Redeemer:— "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." And will not these secondary and superadded gifts be enjoyed with greater delight, from the very consideration of our having desired them, only in submission to the will of God, and of having received them as the expression of his paternal love!

Let me now conclude by reminding you, that the subject which has thus engaged our attention, should direct our views, beyond the scenes of this

present world to a future and eternal state. What is Heaven, but the world where the inhabitants *must* be happy, because their well-regulated desires no sooner arise in the mind than they meet their entire and appropriate gratification! And what is Hell, but the world where the inhabitants *must* be wretched, because theirs is the torment of restless and unsatisfied desire! Their unquenchable thirst for happiness finds no relief; and "that ravenous appetite, which would be preying upon external objects that now fail, turns inward, and as an insatiable vulture, gnaws everlastingly the wretched soul itself." From that tremendous anguish may the God of salvation deliver us! If this be, in

truth, your own most earnest desire, and you have not yet fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before you in the gospel, lose not one single moment; but flee from the wrath to come, and, by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, "lay hold on eternal life."

II.

THE GOVERNMENT OF THE THOUGHTS.

How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee? Jer. 4. 14.

When this pointed interrogation was addressed to Jerusalem and to Judah, their Chaldean invaders were about to spread desolation over the land, as the punishment decreed by God for iniquities which they were still unwilling to abandon. The rapid approach of Nebuchadnezzar, and his devasting army, is represented as combining the

fierceness of the lion, and the swiftness of the eagle, with the resistless force of the whirlwind, when suddenly the heavens are overspread with darkening and portentous clouds. "The lion is come up from his thicket, and the destroyer of the Gentiles is on his way; he is gone forth from his place, to make this land desolate; and thy cities shall be laid waste without an inhabitant.—Behold, he shall come up as clouds, and his chariots shall be as a whirlwind: his horses are swifter than eagles. Woe unto us, for we are spoiled!" One way of deliverance and only one, yet remained within the limits of possibility. That way might have been opened by true repentance and unfeigned contrition, by the aban-

donment of sin, and the purification of the heart. To this method of averting the judgments of their offended God, and of arresting the progress of those enemies who menaced them with captivity and death, they are faithfully and affectionately urged:—"O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved. How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?" There had commenced at Jerusalem some appearance of external reformation: but the hearts of its inhabitants retained a defiling love of sin, and a prevailing inclination to vile idolatry; vain thoughts, evil desires, and debasing affections, still obtained a dwelling-place, as welcome guests, even in their inmost souls. Not more inimical

to the peace and safety of Jerusalem, were vain and evil thoughts, than are such thoughts to *our* best interests. Be assured that the right regulation of the thoughts enters deeply and essentially into the nature of personal holiness and happiness. Favor me, then, with your unremitted attention, while I endeavor to exhibit

FIRST, The importance of the right government of the Thoughts: and

SECONDLY, The most effectual means of securing this important object.

FIRST, Let me direct your regard to the importance of acquiring and maintaining the due government of the Thoughts.

First, then let it be considered, that the absence of good thoughts is itself

a sufficient ground of condemnation at the bar of God.

Of the unrighteous and unholy it is said—"God is not in all their thoughts;" and is not *this* ample evidence of the prevailing character of their minds and hearts? Must it not be a "carnal mind," and must it not be a hardened heart, in which the thought of God can find no place? Must not the love of God be altogether absent from the heart which gives no entertainment, no dwelling-place, even to the thought of his character and his claims? Is it possible for a man to love God, and yet to spend day after day without cherishing any thoughts of God? What ideas are we to form of the man who

spends his days without any grateful recollections of the divine goodness, without any admiring delight in the divine perfections, without any solicitude to enjoy the divine favor, and without any desire to promote the divine glory? That the love of the blessed God dwells not in his heart, is absolutely certain. The God in whose hands his breath is, and in whom are all his springs of existence and capacity and enjoyment, he has not glorified, even in thought, or purpose, or desire! Let every one, then, listen to the voice of conscience, while summoned to answer the question—Is it I, whose mental character, whose prevailing habits of thought have been thus convicted of a radical and most alarming defect?

Let it be considered,

Secondly, That the human mind, while unrenewed, is habitually disposed to the indulgence of thoughts positively vain and evil.

In every human mind which continues unrenewed, not receiving, because not desiring, the control of the sanctifying Spirit, vain and evil thoughts exert an entire ascendancy. Thus it was in the world before the flood: and the record of human depravity at that early period might be adopted by the historian of the age in which we live:—"And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." It is to

the heart that the scrutinizing and all-pervading eye of the omniscient God is chiefly directed. "The Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts."—"Man looketh on the outward appearance," and the reason is sufficiently clear; he cannot look beyond. He can form his judgment only by external indications. The man of most profound sagacity can do no more. He may mark, with quickness of discernment, the unstudied action, or the casual word, or the expressive eye, or the voiceless lip which betrays an emotion in part suppressed: he may deduce, by his acuteness of observation, many an inference which may not mislead;

and he may obtain, not unfrequently, an insight into character, which he knows how to value and how to improve. But the observer, although of most penetrating glance and most commanding intellect, and most deeply versed in the knowledge of human nature, may be, and often is deceived. It is probable, that even the subtle spirit that "deceiveth the whole world," by the ever-varied artifices of seduction, is sometimes himself deceived; and, extensive as must be his knowledge of the human heart, he can have, I conceive, no power at all of ascertaining its thoughts and feelings, except in so far as they are expressed or betrayed by certain intelligible indications. Omniscience is no

attribute of Satan, nor of any being but Jehovah. In language which no creature can appropriate, does the Father of spirits say, "I the Lord search the heart." And He who uttered these words, said also—"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" What, then, must the eye of God discern in every unrenewed heart? What must there be presented to the eye of the Omniscient, in the compass of one single day, in the interior of an unregenerate mind? say—or rather think—what has been sometimes the history of your thoughts within the space of a single hour? Of what character were the subjects on which they were employed? Of what

nature was the ideas suggested—cherished—pursued? What was their tendency; and had they been embodied in action, or even expressed in words, what would have been the sentiments awakened in the minds of those to whose approbation you attach a value? Consider, then, that your heart was, at the very moment, "naked and open in the sight of Him with whom you have to do."

Let it be observed.

Thirdly, That it is the characteristic of the renewed mind to cherish good thoughts.

"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts." Such is the requirement of Him who "waiteth to be gracious, and

delighteth in mercy," but who cannot behold impurity of thought without holy and indignant displeasure. What is the repentance required of the man, who would become a recipient of forgiving mercy, but a change of mind, of which the very first element is a change of Thought? The very first step of the sinner's return to God, is described with equal simplicity and correctness in such words as these;— "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies." The next gradation of progress may be exhibited in these stronger terms;— "I hate vain thoughts, nor can I endure that any longer they should lodge within me." A stage of still greater advancement appears indicated by

such expressions as these: "I thought of thy loving-kindness in the midst of thy temple." And if this be regarded as the representation of a state of mind at one particular period, and not a direct assertion in reference to the prevailing habit of thought, we have at least an interesting and characteristic specimen of a mind truly renewed, in those words of the Psalmist, "In the multiude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul." O! this is indeed the language of a spiritual mind; of a heart right with God. Who can estimate the value, who can describe the delight of this spirituality of mind! "They that are after the flesh, do mind the things of the flesh; but

they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. Now, to be carnally minded, is death; but to be spiritually minded, is life and peace."

Let it be considered,

Fourthly, That it is in the thoughts of the mind that both dispositions and actions originate.

"As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he" in the course and character of his life. The thoughts of the mind have been justly compared to the blossoms which appear on a tree in the vernal season of the year. Many of these blossoms prematurely fall off; but from those which remain springs all the fruit which the tree yields: so are there many thonghts which transiently occupy the mind, without

leaving any permanent trace; but from the thoughts which are cherished and retained spring all the dispositions of the heart, all the words of the lips, and all the actions of the life. It was worthy, then, of the wisest of men, and worthy of the Spirit of wisdom under whose dictation he wrote, most urgently to enforce the safe-keeping of the heart:—"Keep thy heart with all diligence; (or 'above all keeping;') for out of it are the issues of life." There is no member of our body, there is no organ of sensation, there is no faculty of intellect, there is no avenue of feeling, over which it is not important to exercise a watchful care; but more important still is the guardianship of the heart, whence are all

the issues of life. Have you studied the history of the inner man? Have you, with the eyes of self-inspection, carefully traced the process which commences with a rising thought, and terminates in an important action? Have you watched the influence of the suggestion—the incentive—the anticipation of consequences—the suspense, and the final resolve? If you are familiar with processes such as these, and with the correspondent results, it is unnecessary for me to make any further demand on your mind, with a view to demonstrate the importance of the right government of the Thoughts.

Let your attention be now transferred,

SECONDLY, To the most effectual means of attaining and preserving the due government of the Thoughts.

First, there must be the attainment and the exercise of a good conscience. The conscience is designed to be the keeper of the mind and heart. Its appointed office is that of a sentinel to guard the avenues of approach, and to sound the alarm at the first advances of an enemy. But never can the conscience of sinful and degenerate man be competent for such an office, unless the disqualifying influence of guilt be removed, by the efficacy of "the blood which cleanseth from all sin." The heart must remain an impure fountain whence can issue only polluted streams, unless it be

purified by the virtue of atoning blood. It is when "the heart is sprinkled from an evil conscience, as it regards the sins which are past, that we are prepared and disposed so to "exercise ourselves as to have always a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man." The ineffable and serene repose of spirit which arises from faith in the great propitiation, is conducive to the delicate sensibility which recoils from the contact of defilement, even in the images of thought. Let the language of the verse which has been cited remind us, that if it be our desire to guard against the intrusion of vain and evil thoughts, our hearts must be cleansed from the guilt and pollution

of sin.—"Wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved. How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?"

Secondly, The mind must habitually derive from the word of God its best materials of thought.

"I hate vain thoughts," said the Psalmist, "but thy law do I love." He knew too much of the tendencies of his own mind, and too much of the universal laws of intellectual being, to wish, that the expulsion of vain thoughts should be followed by an uninteresting vacuity of thought. This, were it possible, would be undesirable. It would be a dull and dreary blank in existence. It would be, in the lowest sense, *existence;*

it would not deserve the name of *life*. But the desire of the man after God's own heart was, that the place vacated by thoughts which were vain, might be filled by thoughts of substantial excellence. This is indeed the best and the only preservative from thoughts decidedly evil. Could the mind be rendered simply vacant, soon would the tempter pour in a strong and rapid tide of his own impure suggestions. The absence of thoughts which are good he regards as the state most favorable to the entrance of thoughts which are evil; so that without any perversion of the meaning of Scripture we may apply to such a state of mind, our Saviour's description of the inducements presented to

the evil spirit, to occupy the residence into which he anticipates an unresisting facility of admission:—"When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he wandereth over parched deserts in search of a resting-place.* And not finding any, he saith, I will return to my house whence I came; and being come, he findeth it empty, swept and garnished; (as if it directly invited his entrance, and was even prepared for his occupation:) whereupon he goeth and bringeth with him seven other spirits, more wicked than himself, and having entered, there they dwell." "The heart," says an eloquent preacher, "will not consent to be desolated.—Though the room

* Dr. Campbell's Translation.

which is in it may change one inmate for another, it cannot be left void without the pain of most intolerable suffering.—It could not bear to be left in a state of waste and cheerless insipidity. It would revolt against its own emptiness.—Such is the grasping tendency of the human heart, that it must have a something to lay hold of—and which, if wrested away without the substitution of another something in its place, would leave a void and vacancy as painful to the mind, as hunger is to the natural system. It may be dispossessed of one object, but it cannot be desolated of all.—A man will no more consent to the misery of being without an object, because that object is a trifle, or of

being without a pursuit, because that pursuit terminates in some frivolous or fugitive acquirement, than he will voluntarily submit himself to the torture, because that torture is to be of short duration."*

How much of wisdom, then, was there in the method resorted to by the Psalmist, with a view to the right government of his thoughts, and how exquisite is the beauty of expression, with which he has described the intellectual and devotional habits of his mind, in the hundred and thirty-ninth Psalm;—"How precious are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them!" Let us pause a moment, before we proceed to the

* Dr. Chalmers.

verse which follows. What can present such admirable and delightful materials, to occupy the thoughts of man, as the book which contains the thoughts of God? Might not the Bible be entitled,—"The Thoughts of God?" Is it not replete with the contemplations of the Eternal Mind? And what are the lofty and the glorious subjects which they present to our regard? They are the attributes of his own nature—the laws which take their origin from his own rectitude—the purposes of mercy emanating from his own love, and extending to rebels against his throne—the mediatorial scheme of redemption, illustrating, in full-orbed glory, the perfections of his own adorable character—the revela-

tions of a future and eternal world of blessedness! Having obtained on these subjects (though less clearly and less fully than we of the gospel-day) the thoughts of God, we wonder not that the Psalmist should have exclaimed,—"How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee!" With the thoughts and counsels of Jehovah in his mind, "he laid down at night to rest, and when he awoke in the morning, his thoughts naturally recurred to the pleasing theme; he began where he had left off, and found himself in heart and soul still present with God, still

ruminating on him and his works. The mercies of heaven, in the redemption of the church, by the sufferings and exaltation of the true David—how precious are they to believers! How great is the sum, how far exceeding all human arithmetic, to number them! Let them be to us the constant subjects of contemplation, admiration, and thanksgiving day and night; and let death find us engaged in an employment, which, when we awake, and arise from the grave, we shall resume and prosecute to eternity, in the presence of God!"*

Thirdly, There must be earnest prayer, that our thoughts may be

* Bishop Horne's Commentary.

guided and controlled by the influence of the Holy Spirit.

"When He, the Spirit of truth, is come," said Jesus to his disciples, "he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." Now the acquisition of knowledge, and the habitual remembrance of that which is acquired, are usually the result of those two leading operations of the intellect, on which the character of the thoughts chiefly depends. Consider, then, O believer in Jesus, how much you are authorized to expect, in relation to the right government of the thoughts from the influence so faithfully promised. When you take up the Bible and read some selected paragraphs, or

a chapter in regular course, "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation" can steadily fix your thoughts (too often apt to wander) on some truths of vital importance; he can extend, and correct, and elevate your views, and deepen your impressions of those truths which you knew but imperfectly before; he can give a new direction and a wider range to your ideas, and a new and glowing impulse to the best affections of your hearts. When, at the next return of the hour of retired devotion, you resume the study of the sacred book, some other truths, of no inferior interest, may be similarly unfolded to your view, and rendered equally influential in awakening the purest affections of

the soul. Suppose this to be the history of every day; and suppose the truth into which you have been thus guided, in the commencement of every day, to be held in remembrance throughout the course of the day; will there not be acquired more and more of an invaluable facility in the right government of the thoughts? And is the expectation of this extravagant, or unreasonable? Is it too lofty an expectation for a mind which has already become a temple of the Holy Spirit? And "know ye not that (if Christians) ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" Will not, then, the very consideration of the character and influence of the divine

inhabitant, become an incentive to purity of thought? Surely vain thoughts cannot be permitted or tolerated in the temple of the indwelling Deity! Let there be poured forth, then in importunate prayer, the most fervent petitions, that "the thoughts of the heart may be cleansed by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit."

Fourthly, There must be the diligent culture of all holy affections.

While it is true, that the thoughts give excitement to the affections, it is equally true, that the affections give excitement to the thoughts. The affections are the wings on which the intellect itself is sustained, in the soaring elevation of its flight, above the regions of sense. Even in the

pursuits of literature and of science, it would be vain to expect a rapid or a pleasurable progress, without the stimulus arising from a predilection of taste, and a feeling of powerful attachment. How much more is that incentive required in the application of the mind to subjects decidedly spiritual! Would you, then, acquire an aptitude for the employment of the thoughts on things unseen and eternal? Would you attain an increasing degree of facility, in disengaging the powers of thought from all earth-sprung cares and entanglements? Would you rise, as on the wings of eagles, to a region more pure and serene, that you may contemplate, in an unclouded atmosphere, "the things

which are above? Be it your solicitous care, to "keep your hearts in the love of God," by "praying in the Holy Ghost." Be assured, that when most deeply "rooted and grounded in love," you will be able to put forth the best energies of your minds, in endeavoring to *comprehend* what is the breadth and the length and depth and height; and to *know* the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge!

Fifthly, We must habitually realize the divine inspection of our thoughts.

Suppose that your unexpressed and most secret thoughts could be ascertained by a fellow-creature, as soon as they found a place in your mind. Suppose that some one individual had certain means of knowing your

thoughts, over which you could exercise no control. What emotions would you feel in his presence! What intense anxiety would you betray, as well as feel, to repress the very first rising of thoughts, which you might deem unworthy of your character, and, in his estimation, disgraceful! But are you not, at every moment, and in every situation, whether acting, or speaking, or thinking, under the inspection of an omniscient and omnipresent eye? And is it not with Him, as "the Judge of all," that, in a sense inapplicable to any human observer, "you have especially to do?" Let, then the emphatic words of Hagar dwell "for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of your hearts"—"Thou,

God, seest me!" Enter deeply into the spirit which regulated the thoughts of the Psalmist:—"O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting, and mine uprising; thou understandest my thoughts afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways."

Lastly, It is requisite, that we frequently take a retrospect of the history of our thoughts, for the purpose of self-examination.

With unfeigned sincerity may we say to Him, who knows the recesses of our hearts, far better than we know them ourselves, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see (and enable *me*

to see) if there be any wicked way in me; and lead me in the way everlasting." Awfully hypocritical would it be to offer these petitions, without the most determined efforts of scrutinizing self-inspection. At the close of every day, and still more strenuously at the close of every ampler period of our time, let us call ourselves to render an account of the employment of our thoughts. Let the detection of evil thoughts produce its proper and legitimate effects. Let it humble us in the dust of abasement; let it conduct us to the cross of the Redeemer; let it rouse us to greater watchfulness in guarding against the intrusion of vain and evil thoughts; and let it urge us to more earnest prayer that the God of

all grace would effectually control and sanctify the thoughts of our hearts, by "working in us all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power."

In conclusion, let me suggest the inquiry, whether the considerations which have been adduced, ought not to excite in the minds of some who have thought but little on the subject, serious misgivings and apprehensions, with regard to their character in the sight of God. Does not conscience, at this moment, bring against you a most appalling charge? Does it not charge you with innumerable iniquities of thought? Does it not charge you with the additional guilt of thinking lightly of those iniquities? You

cannot deny, that sins of thought are the very spring and fountain of sins in conduct. You cannot deny, that many of your sinful thoughts have been rapidly maturing into principles of action, and have wanted only the force of a besetting temptation to bring them into practical development. You cannot deny, that among the countless multitude of thoughts, which have crowded the entire space between the morning and the evening of many a day, there have been instances in which not one single thought of God, of Christ, or of eternity, obtained admission! Yet is it not specified, as one of the decided characteristics of those who are unfit for heaven, and exposed to endless woe, that "God is

not in all their thoughts?" And is it not expressly said, by the authority of Him who searcheth the heart—that "the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations (and therefore all the individuals) that *forget God?*" Oh, what must be the accumulation of guilt contracted, if, with respect to sins of thought alone, a charge can be substantiated, of a nature sufficiently heinous in the sight of God to require a sentence of eternal banishment from his presence! Hasten, then, to his throne of grace, lest he summon thee, at an unexpected hour, to his throne of judgment! Supplicate, in the name of the only Saviour, deliverance from the wrath to come! Pray that the *thoughts of thine heart*,

as well as the sins of thy life, may be forgiven thee. And, O, what an inducement to offer that prayer, is the assurance, that, with the God whom thou hast insulted and forgotten, "there is forgiveness!"—"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his *thoughts;* and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy on him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Let those vain thoughts be for ever abandoned, which fostered vain hopes, and delusive expectations.

No longer expose to final condemnation your immortal soul, by trusting in yourselves, as though you were righteous, or by neglecting to seek an interest, by faith, in the righteousness

of Jesus. Never let it be absent from your minds, that "he was made sin for us though he knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." "Let, then, the word of Christ,—the glorious gospel which bringeth salvation,—dwell in you richly, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." Let it be the purifier of your heart, the regulator of your thoughts. Let the treasures of truth divine be amply stored within your hearts, and let them be employed as the materials of pleasurable thought, "when you are sitting in the house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you are lying down, and when you are rising up."— "Then will the peace of God which

passeth all understanding keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus;" to whom be glory for ever Amen.

III.

THE GOVERNMENT OF THE TEMPER.

Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And, above all these things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. Col. 3. 12—14.

THE word *Temper*, is usually employed to denote the prevailing spirit and disposition of the mind; so that the *Government* of the Temper comprehends that habitual regulation of all the feelings, whether transient or

permanent, which is most favorable to the discharge of duty, and to the enjoyment and diffusion of happiness. The attainment of that control will be the happy result of the cultivation of those attractive and engaging qualities, which are delineated, with equal force and feeling, in the words we have now read. Keeping then in view this admirable sketch of the Christian temper, drawn by the hand of a master, under the guidance of direct inspiration, it shall be my object to set before you—

First, The Motives which should effectually urge us to the cultivation of this Temper; and

Secondly, The best Methods of aiming at its attainment.

First, Let us very briefly advert to the Motives which urge its cultivation.

I would remind you, then,

First, That the duty of controlling and governing the Temper in social intercourse, arises out of the grand and primary principles of the law of God.

"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself"—is the condensed and comprehensive precept, which embodies all the subordinate requirements essential to human happiness. Is it possible to love our neighbor without endeavoring to promote his peace and comfort? And shall we not strike at the very root of his peace and comfort, if, in the hours of social

intercourse, we exercise no control over our temper and spirit? "There is a power in every individual, over the tranquility of almost every individual. There are emotions, latent in the mind of those whom we meet, which a few words of ours may at any time call forth; and the moral influence, which keeps this power over the uneasy feelings of others under due restraint, is not the least important of the moral influences in its relation to general happiness.—There are minds which can delight in exercising this cruel sway,—which rejoice in suggesting thoughts that may poison the confidence of friends, and render the very virtues that were loved, objects of suspicion to him who loved them.

In the daily and hourly intercourse of human life, there are human beings who exert their malicious skill in devising what subjects may be most likely to bring into the mind of him with whom they converse, the most mortifying remembrances:—and who are faithful in conveying to every one the whispers of unmerited scandal, of which, otherwise, he never would have heard, as he never could have suspected them; though they are careful to express sufficient indignation against the slanderer, and to bring forward as many grounds of suspicion against different individuals, as their fancy can call up." Can you conceive of more direct, or more degrading, or more malignant violations of the

law,—"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself?"

Secondly, Let it be considered, that the cultivation of the Christian Temper will exert a most beneficial influence on our own happiness.

If an unquiet and fretful temper be a source of perpetual annoyance to others, it is still more hostile to the bosom in which it dwells. It infixes the sting of a self-tormentor. It poisons the cup of every enjoyment. On the contrary, a spirit serene and contented has an habitual aptitude for delight, whenever pleasurable excitement occurs; and, even in the absence of all foreign excitement, has sources of internal delectation. This temper of mind, so desirable for its own sake,

is intimately allied also with that fitness for the discharge of the various duties of life, without which they must become, not only difficult, but in a high degree irksome and oppressive.

On this preliminary part of our subject, (the considerations which are pertinent being obvious to all,) I shall detain you only by observing,

Thirdly, That the display of a Christian Temper greatly adorns and recommends the Gospel of Christ.

There prevails in society around us a disposition, of which we are scarcely entitled to complain, to compare and to contrast the man of the world with the professor of serious religion, whenever it may be thought that the result of the comparison will prove disad-

vantageous to the latter. Shall there, then, be materials for eulogizing the character of those who make no pretensions to decided piety, on the ground of their amiableness of temper, and gentleness of spirit; and shall there be ground for an impeachment of those who make a public profession of religion, as in these respects greatly inferior? Shall it be said, with any color of truth, that not a few of them betray a disposition unyielding and unkind, uncharitable and severe, irascible and unforgiving, arbitrary and impetuous? "My brethren, these things ought not so to be." They are incalculably injurious to the souls of men. They arm the carnal and unrenewed mind with all the force of the most

determined prejudice, against those who lay claim to the character of separatists, from an ungodly world, and also against that truth which they profess to embrace. Oh! never let it escape your remembrance, my Christian friends, that not only your own honor is at stake, but also the honor of the glorious cause of truth and holiness, to which you profess a devoted attachment. The honor of our Lord Jesus Christ requires you to adorn in all things, the doctrine of his gospel; and how can it be more beauteously adorned, than by "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price?"—"Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved,

bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, and long-suffering;"—and over all these things, as the connecting girdle of this spiritual attire, put on the graceful and the attractive ornament of love. And let it be the love which "suffereth long and is kind; which envieth not; which vaunteth not itself; which is not puffed up; which doth not behave itself unseemly; seeketh not her own; is not easily provoked; thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; which beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, and endureth all things."

We are now, I trust, prepared to consider,

SECONDLY, the best methods of

aiming at the cultivation of the Christian temper.

It seems to be the opinion of some, that a bad temper is an evil of such a nature, as almost to preclude the hope of amendment. This, however, is an opinion which would have disgraced a philosophic pagan; how much more a disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ! If it be the boast of philosophy, that it can effect much, and often has effected much, in the improvement of the natural temper, it is beyond all doubt the glory of Christianity, that it can effect, and often has effected, incomparably more. With this encouraging conviction, let me proceed to suggest some scriptural advices for the due regulation of the temper.

First, Let it be the primary object of solicitude, that the heart be renewed and controlled, by the power of sanctifying grace.

Christian morals must have their foundation in Christian principles; and the effectual control of the temper must have its origin in the renovation of the heart, by the power of the regenerating Spirit. Not more true is it, that unless a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God, than it is true, that except a man be born again, he cannot display "the mind which was in Christ Jesus." He may, indeed, on philosophic principles, acquire a certain degree of control over the external indication of feelings, but never will the temper

of his secret soul bear resemblance to that of our Divine Exemplar, or be conformed to the requirements of the law of love, unless it be formed and moulded by the influence of the gospel, and the power of renewing grace.

It is under this influence alone that genuine and unfeigned humility is cherished in any human heart; and where this grace of primary importance has no place in the mind, there can be no security for the due control of the temper, even for a single hour. Sins of temper usually spring from the sin of pride—that "root of bitterness" which produces so much bitter fruit. In every rank of life, man is apt greatly to overrate his own im-

portance and his own claims. He is but the creature of yesterday;—a feeble, dependent, polluted, dying worm; and yet he is disposed to erect and elevate himself into a kind of subordinate deity; and, having thus idolized himself, to demand a correspondent homage from others. If they display not the respectful deference and the yielding spirit which he considers due to his character, or his station, or his talents, he betrays angry and indignant resentment. The apostle, therefore, strikes at the very root of the evil, in that admirable injunction which he addressed to the Philippian believers, and enforced by the example of our blessed Redeemer himself:—"Let nothing be done

through strife or vain glory; but in lowliness of mind, let each esteem other better than themselves.—Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus; who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

Perhaps there are no defects or feelings, to which, more frequently than those of temper, the mournful complaints are applicable, which an apostle thus poured forth: "That

which I do, I allow not; for what I would, that do I not: but what I hate, that do I. For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not: For the good that I would I do not; but the evil that I would not, that I do."

How powerful, then, is the inducement to pray without ceasing, that He who has all power over the spirit of man, would exert over our feelings a salutary control, and in the moment of exposure to unholy irritation and excitement, would preserve us in perfect peace. This entire control, it would be too much to expect from the unaided efforts of our own minds;

but it is not too much to expect from the promised succour of the Holy Spirit, since it is expressly said, that "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, and meekness." What are these attractive excellencies of character, but the very elements of the Christian temper? If these, then, are the communications of the Holy Spirit, surely the most direct and the most effectual method of attaining the government of the temper, is to seek, by earnest prayer, the indwelling of the Spirit of God. Distinguished in a high degree has been the success of some Christians, who have combined persevering prayer with persevering effort, to acquire an habitual command of

temper. A very remarkable and edifying instance of this success is presented to our view, in the character of the eminently holy and useful Mr. Fletcher of Madeley. "He was meek," says his biographer, "like his Master, as well as lowly in heart. Not that he was so by nature, but a man of strong passions, and prone to anger in particular; insomuch that he has frequently spent the greater part of the night, bathed in tears, imploring victory over his own spirit. And he did not strive in vain. He did obtain the victory, in a very eminent degree. Yea, so thoroughly had grace subdued nature,—so fully was he renewed in the spirit of his mind,—that for many years before his death, I

believe he was never observed by any one, friend or foe, to be out of temper, on any provocation whatever. The testimony that Bishop Burnet bears of Archbishop Leighton might be borne of him with equal propriety:—'After an intimate acquaintance with the Archbishop for many years, and after being with him by night and by day, at home and abroad, in public and in private; I must say, I never heard an idle word drop from his lips:—I never saw him in any temper in which I myself would not have wished to be found at death!'"

Secondly, Let us guard against the very first tendencies to the workings of an evil Temper.

There are two descriptions of evil

temper which are equally to be deprecated and repressed. The one is the sullen temper, and the other the irascible. The former, if less violent, is more lasting; assuming too often the character of a gloomy, morose, and discontented habit of mind, effectually disqualifying the individual for all enjoyment, unfitting him for all society and rendering him perfectly intractable. The latter, if less permanent, has an aspect still more alarming. How it distorts the expression of the countenance; how it disturbs the exercise of reason; how it degrades the character of a Christian; how it quenches and grieves the Spirit of love; how it amasses materials for self-reproach; how it exposes to

consequences the most tremendous! In its fearful progress, it resembles the movement of a ponderous mass from the summit of a hill: at first, the motion is gradual and subject to some control; but the velocity is every instant accelerated, till the force it acquires in its desent bears down every interposing barrier, and bids defiance to all resistance. Seize then the golden opportunity while reason retains its power. Let an instantaneous ejaculation of the heart ascend to Him who heareth prayer, for the succour which he can promptly impart. Let there be, at least, the delay of a moment, before indulgence be conceded to the spirit of rising anger; and if even this brief interval be

gained, there is some reason to hope, that the threatened and approaching paroxysm may be averted. A spark is more easily extinguished than a flame. "The discretion of a man deferreth his anger."—"He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."

Thirdly, Let the *expressions* of an evil Temper be resolutely controlled.

"A soft answer turneth away wrath; but grievous words stir up anger." While cutting words exasperate the individual against whom they are directed, they have the effect of stimulating to more tumultuous emotions the passion from which they spring. How often do we feel

conscious; that our words are not only the utterance, but the instruments, and the excitements of thought; and if thus they operate when we use them mentally, how much more powerful must be their operation when we use them audibly! Our very tones of voice seem to have a power over our tones of feeling; and, by an instantaneous reaction, arising out of the mysterious sympathy and harmony of the inner and the outer man, they assume the character at once both of causes and effects. We are aware also, that when our feelings have not only been strongly excited, but also strongly expressed, we stand committed; we have taken a decided step, and we know not how to retract. The desire

of consistency, at least in appearance, urges us to proceed; and into that desire there enters much of the spirit of pride. What abundant reason, then, have we to present the Psalmist's prayer:—"Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips!"

Fourthly, Let the dispositions and tempers of others be duly studied and regarded.

Often does a regard to self-interest induce men to study the character of others. They deem it important to ascertain, what may be calculated to please, and what may have a tendency to disturb and to annoy. Of these discoveries, they find it beneficial to avail themselves, in order to

extend the sphere of that influence which they know how to employ for the accomplishment of their sinister ends. Now shall we not study the character of those with whom we have intercourse, for nobler purposes, and from purer motives? It would be worthy of an enlightened disciple and follower of Jesus, thus to reason and reflect:—"I am aware that I have my own peculiarities of temper and of disposition; yet I am accustomed to expect from others some degree of indulgent kindness: is it not then incumbent on me to be kindly considerate and equally indulgent towards them? Shall I make an attack on that which I have reason to regard as the weakest and most

vulnerable point, in the mental character of another? Shall I act towards one who has claims on my kindness, or towards any human being upon earth, the part of a tempter, by stirring up the dormant evil of the heart? Shall I elicit a spark, which I have reason to fear may soon enkindle a flame, or even produce an explosion? Oh, this would be to indulge the adversary of God and of man with a double triumph;—first, a triumph over myself, degraded into the character of a tempter; and then over a fellow-creature, whom, as though Satan's emissary, I have actually tempted and ensnared!"

Fifthly, Whenever there is the consciousness of having culpably given

offence, let there be prompt and humble acknowledgments.

How proud and unsanctified is the spirit that cannot stoop to offer an apology, even when there is the secret consciousness that a humble acknowledgment is due; and how fearful are often the consequences of a refusal! What must be the standard of morals, and the criterion of right and wrong in that mind, in which the idea of *honor* is but little associated with the idea of *justice?* What must be the state of the moral sense in the mind of that man, who persuades himself, that the law of honor demands resentment, when the law of justice requires concession?

Most unwelcome, indeed, to human

nature is the confession of a fault; but the very pain is salutary; both as it summons to the exercise of humility, and as it is calculated to deter from a repetition of the offence. It is unquestionably a Christian duty, for it is inculcated by apostolic authority in terms the most explicit. "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another"—is the injunction of the Apostle James. And if this be a duty which we owe to man, it is also a duty which we owe to the blessed God. Be it remembered, that every sin against a fellow-creature is at the same time a sin against God, whose law requires us to love our neighbor as ourselves. Of all sin, without exception, it is said—"He

that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall find mercy." The sins committed against our fellow-creatures should be humbly confessed both before them and before God: for if either acknowledgment be withheld, there will be wanting the evidence that the other confession is sincere. "If we confess our sins"—as God requires us, with a humble and contrite heart—"he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Sixthly, Let there be no approach to an implacable and unforgiving spirit.

Perhaps we have sometimes heard from the lips of one who considered himself aggrieved and injured, such

utterances of the heart as this:—"I may forgive, but I cannot forget the offence." And the attendant indications of feeling may have rendered it too evident, that the proffered forgiveness, while the language of the lips, was by no means the language of the heart. Is this the forgiveness which God requires us to exercise? With such feelings as these in the heart, will a man venture before the throne of God, and offer that petition:—"Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us?" Would it satisfy our desires and tranquilize our consciences, that *such* forgiveness should be extended to *us*, by Him, at whose bar we must appear? Can we entertain a hope, or

even dare to offer a supplication, that to us, there should be remitted by God a debt of ten thousand talents if we have not the heart to remit a debt due to us from a fellow-creature of even a hundred pence? "How often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him," asked Peter: "till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, until seven times; but until seventy times seven." It was on this occasion, that our Saviour gave to his disciples the affecting parable, (to which allusion has now been made) of the debtor who hardened his heart against a fellow-servant, on whom he had an inconsiderable claim, although claims, to an immense extent, had been in his

own case freely remitted by his Lord. "O thou wicked servant," well might his Lord exclaim, "shouldst not thou have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his Lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due to him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye, *from your hearts*, forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."

O that we participated largely in the feelings of her whom Jesus himself commended, when he said, "Her sins which are many are forgiven; for she loved much."—"Love *I* much?—I have much forgiven;"—may every Christian say, while he examines the

frame and temper of his spirit, and reflects on the vastness of his obligations. Surely if there dwelt in our hearts more of grateful love to Him by whose redeeming blood we obtain the forgiveness of our sins, it would become an easy, and even a delightful task, to extend forgiveness to others. In connection with these remarks, I would add,—

Finally, Let us reflect much, with a view to constant imitation, on the perfect and glorious example of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

"Dost thou well to be angry?"—is a question which you are sometimes, perhaps, disposed, like the petulant prophet, to answer in the affirmative, alleging the greatness of the provoca-

tion. At such a moment, call to mind the provocations offered to our Divine Redeemer. Think of the base ingratitude and the perpetual insults he endured. Think of the contradiction of sinners, and the revilings of blasphemers, he had to encounter, throughout the entire course of his suffering life, and especially when it was hastening to a close. Think of the irritating language with which he was assailed in the palace of Caiaphas, and in the hall of Pilate, and in the presence of Herod; and then yield your minds to the force of the touching representations of the Apostle Peter: "If when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto

were ye called; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth; who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously." Let, then, that mind and that temper be in us which was also in Christ Jesus, to whom be glory and honor and ever-during praise!

IV.

THE GOVERNMENT OF THE TONGUE.

If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. James 3. 2.

"THE tongue," affirms this Apostle, "can no man tame." Animals the most fierce and the most formidable, have been subjected to the rule of man, and, by his sagacity, rendered tractable and docile. But it transcends all human power to impose an effectual curb on the tongue of unregenerate man, or entirely to counteract the venom emitted from his

lips. Hopeless, however, as might be the effort to control the tongue of another, not so is the attempt to control our own. It is confessedly difficult, but it is indispensably requisite; for the same Apostle has said—"If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain." The Government of the Tongue, then, it is absolutely necessary to attain; and he who acquires it in the highest degree, is the Christian of most distinguished eminence:—"If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body." The human body is here represented, by

the Apostle, as a complex system of members and organs, designed to be subject to the authority, and subservient to the purposes of the indwelling mind. Of these organs, there is one, over which it is peculiarly difficult to obtain a due ascendancy. If then that control be acquired, much easier will be the task of duly restraining the rest; so that the man who has acquired the government of his tongue, may be supposed to have attained a correspondent dominion over all the organs, over all the senses, and over all the appetites of the corporeal frame. If any man, therefore, could be found, who, since the acquisition of that power, had never in any instance abused, nor

failed to improve, the faculty of speech, he might be regarded as a perfect man: and, in so far as there is an approach to this exalted attainment, there is acquired, by the controlling mind, a facility in bridling and governing the complex system of "the outer man."

Let me, then, engage your fixed attention,

FIRST, To the peculiar importance of the government of the Tongue; and,

SECONDLY, To the principles by which this Government is to be acquired and maintained.

FIRST, let us reflect on the importance of attaining this control.

Consider, *first*, The dignity and excellence of the faculty of speech.

He who delights to gather materials for admiration and praise, out of the curious and wondrous economy of man's living frame, will find much to repay his researches in the contemplation of the faculty of speech. Think of the delicate and difficult articulations which intelligible speech requires. Think of the combination of a few simple and elementary sounds denoted by a small number of alphabetical characters, so as to form all the thousands of words which we employ in the conveyance of thought. Think of the power acquired in early life, of connecting with these sounds the ideas which they are employed to express; so that even before the formalities of

education have commenced, there has been an admirable progress made in the knowledge of the arbitrary symbols of thought, by means of which we converse. Think of the power of memory which the use of language involves. Think of the influence of words in aiding and guiding all our processes of thought, even when no sentence escapes our lips. Who gave us this power of articulate speech, which raises us so far above the most sagacious of all the inferior tribes of animated nature? Who sustains all the delicate sensibilities of the ear and of the tongue, required for distinct articulation? Answer such questions as these, and surely you will not be disposed to unite with those who

say,—"Our tongues are our own; who is Lord over us." Surely, if you feel aright, you will enter into the grateful emotions of him who exclaimed, "Awake up, my glory;—my heart is prepared; I will sing and give praise, even with my glory."

Consider, *secondly*, the influence which the Tongue is capable of exerting over the minds and characters of others.

Can you specify the country, or the age, or the condition of society, in which this influence has not been powerful? Conceive of the effects produced, even on a tribe of savages, by the simple and vehement oratory of a warlike chief. Conceive, if you are able, of the effects produced on a

democratic assembly of ancient Greeks by the energies of Demosthenian eloquence. You have sometimes felt, perhaps, the willing subjugation of the soul to the fascinating and commanding talents of some master of the power of speech, who knew well the avenues which give access to the human heart. And long before it was possible for you to know what the word eloquence denotes, you felt the power of the living, and animating, and soothing voice. You listened to the music of a mother's most endearing accents, and to the joy-inspiring tones of a father's voice of love. And as your capabilities of thought began to unfold themselves under parental fosterage, you imbibed full many a sentiment,

and received full many an impression, even while you were only in the act of acquiring the use of your mother-tongue. And what is the history of all your companionship, but the history of the reciprocal influences of thought and feeling, communicated through the medium of speech? The influence which in your early days you felt, without tracing it to its source, you have long since begun to exert, and you are daily in the habit of exerting, over the minds of those around you. Is that influence,—let me most earnestly and affectionately inquire,—is that influence of a character beneficial, or is it of a character injurious to the dearest interests of your associates? Would they have

been losers, or would they have been gainers, had they never listened to your voice?

Consider, *thirdly*, the awful responsibility connected with the employment of the Tongue.

Hear the declaration of Him who will hereafter occupy that throne, before which shall be gathered all nations:—"I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment; for by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." It is, I conceive, as if our Lord had said:—"The evidences of thy character shall be sufficiently gathered from the words of thy lips; so that, independently of

thine actions, there will be abundant materials for the decisions of the judgment-day." Even a philosophic heathen could say,—"Such as a man is, such are his words:" and He who knew, infinitely better, what is in man, said,—"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." If the tongue, in one single conversation, or even in one significant expression, may be regarded as the index to the heart, what a mass of materials for the proceedings of the judgment-seat must be accumulating every day of life, as the words, whether thoughtfully or heedlessly, are falling from our lips! What an awakening consideration should it at all times prove,—that every word we speak is heard by Him

whose ear (no less than his eye) is in every place; and that every utterance of the lips is recorded in "the book of His remembrance!" O, for the blotting out, then, of "the hand-writing that is against us" in that book! O, for an interest in the abundant mercy of Him who has said,—"I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins!" Who that attempts to retrace the history of the communications of his own lips, will not acknowledge the necessity of an interest in the sacrifice of expiation which was offered on Calvary? What can authorize the feeling of repose and tranquillity in the prospect of the day of account, but a believing reliance on

the mercy of God through our Lord Jesus Christ, who "was made sin for us, though he knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him?"

No doubt, then, it may be presumed, can remain on your minds, with regard to the peculiar and inexpressible importance of the Government of the Tongue. You are prepared, I trust, to direct your willing attention,

SECONDLY, To the principles on which we should aim at acquiring that control.

First, Let our chief anxiety be directed to the fountain of thought and of language.

Hopeless will be the effort to purify the streams, unless the source be pure.

Unreasonable will be the expectation of valuable fruit, unless the tree be good. In the discourse of our Saviour to which I have already adverted, this subject is placed in the clearest and the strongest light. "Either make the tree good, and his fruit good: or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt; for the tree is known by his fruit.—How can ye, being evil, speak good things?—A good man, out of the good treasure of the heart, bringeth forth good things; and an evil man, out of the evil treasure, bringeth forth evil things." Who, then, is the good man, whose heart contains a good treasure of the materials requisite for edifying discourse? It is the man who is prepared to speak

of God, and of Christ, and of heaven, because he delights to think of God, and of Christ, and of heaven. It is the man who is "spiritually-minded," being "born of the Spirit," and "led by the Spirit," as one of "the children of God."—Wonder not, then, that it should have been said by the Saviour, 'Ye must be born again.'

To those who have the hope and the evidence of this renewal of the mind, I would say:—Let the keeping of the heart be the care of every day. Let it be right with God, and let it be right with man. Let the love of God dwell there, and it will be your delight, with your lips, "to bless his name,—abundantly to utter the memory of his great goodness, to speak of the glory

of his kingdom, to make known his mighty acts, to testify of his righteousness, and to show forth his salvation." Let that love of man, also, which thinketh no evil, dwell there, and evil-speaking will, in no instance, defile your lips. From those lips shall ever flow the words of kindness, because the law of love is written on the heart.

Secondly, Let us avoid and detest all those abuses of the Tongue, by which the power of speech would be perverted, and its utility counteracted.

These abuses include—

1. All that is inconsistent with Truth.

He who asserts a falsehood, or promotes deception, or violates the confidence reposed in him for veracity,

does what in him lies to destroy all the securities of society, to undermine the very basis of its constitution, and to reduce it to a state of pitiable and wretched barbarism. If even among men of the world every species of untruth is considered despicable and degrading, O how high should be the standard of veracity and sincerity among the disciples of that Divine Master, "in whose lips was found no guile!" My Christian brethren, "speak ye every one truth to his neighbor;"—truth without subterfuge and without equivocation;—truth which will bear the scrutiny of conscience; yes, and of that Searcher of the heart, "whose eyes are as a flame of fire."

These abuses include—

2. All that is inconsistent with the feelings of Christian kindness and charity.

On this head I offer, without apology, the forcible and pungent remarks of Dr. Chalmers:—"It is a fault to *speak* evil one of another, but the essence of the fault lies in the want of that charity which *thinketh* no evil. Had the heart been filled with this principle, no such bad thing as slander would have come out of it.—The forms of evil speaking, however, break out into manifold varieties. There is the resentful outcry. There is the manly and indignant disapproval. There is the invective of vulgar malignity. There is the poignancy of satirical remark. There is the

giddiness of mere volatility, which spreads its entertaining levities over a gay and light-hearted party. These are all so many transgressions of one and the same duty: and you can easily conceive an enlightened Christian sitting in judgment over them all, and taking hold of the right principle upon which he would condemn them all; and which, if brought to bear with efficacy on the consciences of the different offenders, would not merely silence the passionate evil-speaker out of his outrageous exclamations, and restrain the malignant evil-speaker from his deliberate thrusts at the reputation of the absent; but would rebuke the humorous evil-speaker out of his fanciful and amusing

sketches, and the gossiping evil-speaker out of his tiresome and never-ending narratives."

To this vivid and pointed specification by the Christian preacher, allow me to add a sentence or two from the pen of a French moralist; appealing, it is confessed, to principles of an inferior order, yet such as are well calculated to produce effect:—"He of whom you delight to speak evil, may become acquainted with what you have said; and he will be your enemy: or, if he remain in ignorance of it, you will still have to reproach yourself with the meanness of attacking one who had no opportunity of defending himself. If scandal is to be secret, it is the crime of a *coward*;

if it is to become known, it is the crime of a *madman*."

The abuses to be avoided include—

3. All that is inconsistent with the utmost delicacy and purity.

Hear the inspired writer of the Epistle to the Ephesians:—"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient:" or rather, which are *not to be tolerated;* being highly offensive to God, and highly injurious to man. From the import of the terms employed in the original, the Apostle is supposed to advert here, to artfully turned expressions, in which more is meant than meets the ear, and more than the modest ear could tolerate;—

in which, by words of double meaning, there is displayed the execrable wit, that renders terms, in themselves not indelicate, the vehicle, when artfully combined, of conveying ideas indelicate in the highest degree. From uttering and from hearing this language of deep depravity, may the God of all grace preserve the young!

Let these hints suffice, in reference to the many abuses of the Tongue, which it is of the greatest importance to avoid.

Thirdly, Let there be more than ordinary vigilance, where there is more than ordinary danger.

Consideration should, in every instance, precede expression. If we would adopt the only rational method

in which words can be uttered, we must determine—first to think, and then to speak. "Either be silent," said Pythagoras to his disciples, "or say something that is better than silence." And a greater than Pythagoras has said;—"In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin, but he that refraineth his lips is wise."—"Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words, there is more hope of a fool than of him." But if the habit of consideration be at all times desirable, how much more requisite must it be in circumstances of peculiar danger! That danger may arise sometimes from *within*, and originate in our own hearts. Often it may be imminent, under the impulse of strong and

ardent feeling, and especially under the excitement of angry and tumultuous emotions. How important, then, is the exhortation of the Apostle James:—"Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." If wrath be rising, if the storm be gathering in thy soul, summon to thine aid the most effectual principles of self-control. Suspect thyself; dread thyself; and look up to Him who is able, in the moment of peril, "to succor them that are tempted."

The danger to be apprehended arises sometimes from *without* still more than from within. Of this source of peril the Psalmist was feelingly

aware;—"I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me. I was dumb with silence; I held my peace even from good; and my sorrow was stirred." If, as in the case of David, injuries have been received, there may be danger of uttering, in return, impatient, and impetuous, and resentful, and recriminating, and heart-cutting words. If favors have been received, there may be danger of yielding a sinful assent to the opinions expressed, and the principles maintained. In the hours of social intercourse, how gradual and easy is often the transition from the expression of sentiments with which you may safely

accord, to the utterance of sentiments with which it would be culpable to accord; and, under these circumstances, how perplexing and entangling does the course of conversation often become! What a painful and difficult struggle then commences in the mind, between the fear of offending man, and the fear of offending God! And although a holy decision of character will promptly determine in what manner the struggle shall terminate, who is there that cannot perceive the extreme danger of such a situation to the timid, the modest and the young? Nor let it be forgotten, that silence itself may be sin; and sin it undoubtedly is, if it proceed from that "fear of man which bringeth a

snare ;"—a fear of boldly avowing the principles of the Gospel, and maintaining the honor of the cause of Christ. "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and my words," said the Lord Jesus, "of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels."

Fourthly, Let us remember, that it is incumbent upon us to conduct our social intercourse, so as not only to avoid doing evil, but also to effect all possible good.

Not satisfied with saying merely,—"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth ;—the Apostle added,—"but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers." The

Christians of Colosse are also thus exhorted:—"Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man." It is as if the Apostle had said:—"Let there be in your conversation a principle of holy vitality, which may prove that your hearts are alive to God: let there be in it a corrective principle, preventing the tendencies to that which is corrupt,—too often apparent in social intercourse: let there be in it the virtue of a powerful stimulant, exciting the minds of others to all that is pure and salutary, while it imparts to conversation a zest most gratifying to the spiritual taste." And ought we to feel at a loss for materials to conduct, on these

principles, the interchange of thought and sentiment, in the house of friendly intercourse? What was the subject on which the two celestial visitants conversed with our Lord, on the Mount which was the scene of his transfiguration? What was the class of subjects on which Jesus usually conversed with his disciples? What were the subjects most interesting to the minds of those primitive Christians, who "continued steadfastly in the Apostle's doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers,—eating their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people?" No dejection sat on their countenance; no melancholy brooded over their minds; no

moroseness could be detected in their demeanor; no insipidity rendered unattractive their conversation; yet we cannot doubt that their chief and favorite topics of discourse were connected with "the decease accomplished at Jerusalem," and its wondrous and glorious results. What other subjects could be in their estimation equally interesting, when, with one mind and one heart, they counted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus their Lord; and were chiefly solicitous to live to his glory on earth, and to dwell eternally in his presence in heaven? O that we could imbibe more of their spirit, and then would it be easier to imitate, in some degree, the style and character

of their heavenly conversation! Were this attained, what incalculable benefits might we not diffuse throughout the sphere of our social intercourse!

Fifthly, Let us connect with our best directed efforts our most earnest prayers for divine aid.

A most appropriate prayer is to be found in an effusion of the inspired Psalmist:—"Lord, I cry unto thee: make haste unto me; give ear unto my voice, when I cry unto thee. Let my prayer be set forth before thee, as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice. Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips." Our daily prayers, including petitions such as these, should have, as much as pos-

sible, the regularity and the constancy of the morning and the evening sacrifice anciently offered at Jerusalem; and if offered by faith in him of whose atoning blood those sacrifices were the appointed symbols, they will rise to heaven as acceptably as the cloud of odoriferous and emblematic incense. If we thus lift up our ardent desires to God for communications which He alone can bestow, we shall not fail to receive the aid of heavenly grace, in restraining our lips from evil, and in exciting that spirituality of mind which is the best preparative for the hours of social intercourse. If we habitually converse much with God, we shall have the best preparation for conversing well and profitably with

men. It will then also become easy and natural to us to offer such petitions as the Psalmist's, not merely in the hours of periodical devotion, but at every moment of solicitude and of danger, when aid from above may be especially required.

Lastly, Let us examine ourselves frequently, at the bar of conscience, in reference to the government of the Tongue.

Have we not, on this subject, occasion for very deep regret, and penitential abasement of spirit? How little have we honored God by the improvement of this noble faculty, his gracious gift! How little have we effected by the power of speech, for the spiritual benefit of those around

us! Were we to be deprived of this faculty, in any degree, by the effect of paralyzing disease, how heavy a burden might our consciences feel, from the recollections of our misimprovement of this invaluable gift? Are there not some who, instead of doing good, have occasioned incalculable evil by the abuse of the Tongue? "The tongue" of some "is a fire, a world of iniquity; so is the tongue among our members that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell." So let it not be with any one of us! May pardon be obtained for past offences and past deficiencies, through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus: and may there be granted, in answer

to prayer, the effectual aid of the Holy Spirit to control and sanctify the faculty of speech; that "not offending in word," we may attain the perfection referred to in our text, being able to govern, by most effectual discipline, the whole economy of "the outer man," to the glory of our God, and the spiritual and eternal benefit of all within the sphere of our influence.

V.

THE GOVERNMENT OF THE CONDUCT.

Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. 1 Cor. 10: 31.

We are in some danger of undervaluing such parts of Scripture as refer to circumstances in the primitive Church, to which no exact parallel can be found among ourselves. Yet frequently may we trace to these very circumstances the enforcement of principles, both of faith and of conduct, characterized by vital importance, and designed for universal

application. A striking and instructive instance of this occurs in connection with the words which have now been read. The question had probably been proposed to the Apostle :—" Is it, under any circumstances, lawful for Christians, in their occasional intercourse with the heathen around them, to partake of food which had been previously carried into an idol's temple, and regarded in the light of an offering?" The Apostle replies with admirable discrimination and wisdom :—" Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof;" so that whatever he has provided for

the food of man, may be gratefully received as his gift. "If any of them that believe not, bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake. But if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not, for his sake that showed it, and for conscience sake; for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." The enlightened Christian might be so convinced of the absolute non-entity of an idol, as to believe, that neither good nor harm could attach to the food from its contact with an idol's altar. But his conduct was not to be guided exclusively by his own conceptions. It was incumbent on him to take into

view, the ideas and the feelings of others. He owed a duty to all who might be present on that occasion. If any were idolaters, they might be in danger of supposing that he gave some countenance to their usages, by partaking of that food. If any were believers, either their minds might be grieved by that which they deemed inconsistent and culpable in their Christian brother; or they might be induced, by the force of his example, to do that, respecting which they were not without some scruples of conscience. Now to disregard the voice of conscience, even in its faintest whispers, is sinful; and therefore to do that which is calculated to excite or encourage another to disregard

even the scruples of a tender conscience, is displeasing in the sight of God. The Apostle, therefore, having said, "Eat not, for his sake that showed it, and for conscience sake," adds, in explanation;—"Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other." He then anticipates an objection on the part of the individual thus interdicted, who might be disposed to say: "But why is my liberty judged by another man's conscience?" Why is the scrupulous conscience of another man to be the guide or the judge of my conduct? "For if I, by the bounteous grant of God, be allowed to partake of food without restriction, why am I evil spoken of for that for which I give thanks?" In answer to this

objection, the Apostle lays down a principle sublimely simple, which recommends itself to every enlightened mind; and is applicable not only to cases bearing resemblance to that which had been specified, but to all the varying circumstances in which we can, by any possibility, be placed in the course of human life:—"Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, *do all to the glory of God*." You have before you, then, in these words of inspiration, *the grand directory for the Government of the Conduct.* May the blessing of the Holy Spirit rest upon the attempt now to be made, to recommend and to enforce this grand principle, in connection with some general rules

which the principle itself either involves or requires.

Beginning, then, with the principle itself, let me say :—

FIRST, Aim, in every action, and in every enjoyment, to please and to glorify God.

Character is ascertained by motive : and the governing motive in the conduct of life cannot be right, unless it correspond with the design for which life itself is given. What the design of Him who made us is, we may learn from the recorded expressions of the inhabitants of the world above, in the act of rendering homage to the Almighty :—"Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honor, and power; for thou hast created all

things; and *for thy pleasure* they are and were created." With the design of creation, that of redeeming mercy is in perfect unison. "Ye are not your own," said an Apostle to believers in Jesus, "for ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God with your bodies and your spirits, which are his. Of him, and through him, and to him, are all things, to whom be glory for ever. I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." Our lowly, yet aspiring ambition, then, as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, should be, to enjoy the honor of perpetual employment

in his service, and to receive the intimations of his gracious acceptance and approval. We should desire to be "in the house of God, which is the church of the living God,—vessels unto honor, sanctified and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work. Whatsoever we do in word or deed, we should do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving glory to God by him." That such was not only the precept but the practice of the Apostles and first Christians, is evident, not only from their declarations, but from the general tenor of their lives. And does this require a sanctity peculiar to the primitive Christians, and not to be attained by us? Let me exhibit to your view the

prevailing sentiments and actuating motives of some devoted servants of God in periods recently past. I will first adduce the example of that theologian of distinguished intellect, the excellent President Edwards, of America. Among the resolutions which he formed, in dependence on divine grace, for the government of his conduct, and which he determined every week to review, were the following:

"Resolved; never to do, or to be, any thing, in soul or in body, but what tends to the glory of God."

"Resolved; never to act as if I were in any way my own, but entirely and altogether God's."

"Resolved; to live with all my might while I do live."

The sentiment of this resolution is thus beautifully amplified by Dr. Doddridge :

"Live, while you live, the Epicure would say,
And seize the pleasures of the present day.
Live, while you live, the sacred Preacher cries,
And give to God each moment as it flies.
Lord, in my view, let both united be,
I live in pleasure, when I live to thee."

"I have been before God," (said President Edwards, in one of his private papers,) "and I have given all that I am, and have, to God, so that I am not, in any respect, my own. I can claim no right in myself; no right in this understanding, this will, these affections that are in me; no right to this tongue, these hands, these feet, these senses. I have given every

power to him. I have expressly engaged to take the Almighty God for my whole portion and felicity, looking on nothing else as any part of my happiness. Now henceforth I am not to act in any respect as my own. I shall act as my own, if I ever make use of any of my powers to any thing that is not to the glory of God; or do not make the glorifying of God my whole and entire business; if I murmur in the least at afflictions; if I am any way uncharitable; if I am angry because of injuries; if I do any thing purely to please myself; or avoid any thing for the sake of my ease; or omit any thing because it is great self-denial; if I trust to myself; if I take any of the praise of any good that

I do, or rather God does by me; or if I am any way proud."

To the sentiments and resolutions of this holy man, let me add those of one of a former age, who lived in a period of great persecution: I refer to the eminent non-conformist minister, Joseph Alleine. In a letter to a friend, he thus wrote :—

"I desire to know no other business than to please and honor my God, and serve my generation, in that short allowance of time that I have here, before I go hence and be seen no more. Shall I commend to you the lesson that I am about to learn? It is to be entirely devoted to the Lord, that I may be able to say after the Apostle,—'To me to live is Christ,'—

that in all my actions, whether sacred or civil, I may be doing but one work, and pursuing but one design. My desire is, that God may be pleased by me, and glorified in me, not only by my praying, and preaching, and almsgiving, but even by my eating, and drinking, and sleeping, and visits, and discourses: that I may 'do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving glory to God by him.' Too often do I take a wrong aim, and miss my mark; but I will tell you what are the rules I set myself, and strictly impose upon myself from day to day:—never to lie down, but in the name of God; not barely for natural refreshment, but that a wearied servant of Christ may be recruited and fitted to serve him

better the next day:—never to rise up but with this resolution;—Well, I will go forth this day in the name of God, and will make religion my business, and spend the day for eternity:—never to enter upon my calling, but first thinking, I will do these things as unto God, because he requireth these things at my hands, in the place and station to which he hath appointed me:—never to sit down to the table, but resolving, I will not eat merely to please my appetite, but to strengthen myself for my Master's work:—never to make a visit but upon some holy design, resolving to leave something of God wherever I go. This is that which I have been for some time learning, and am pressing hard after;

and if I strive not to walk by these rules, let this paper be a witness against me."

Long as these extracts have been, I must add a few sentences from the Life of the holy and devoted Brainerd. When he had nearly finished his course of self-denying labors, he said:—"My heaven is to please God, and glorify him; to give all to him, and to be wholly devoted to his glory. This is the heaven I long for; that is my religion, and that is my happiness, and always was, ever since I suppose I had any true religion.—It is impossible for any rational creature to be happy without doing all for God: God himself could not make him happy any other way. I long to be

in heaven, praising and glorifying God with the holy angels: all my desire is to glorify God.—There is nothing in the world worth living for, but doing good, and finishing God's work. I see nothing else in the world, that can yield any satisfaction, besides living to God, pleasing him, and doing his whole will. Can you refrain from saying, Let me live the life, "let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his?"

Secondly, Let the word of God be habitually studied as the rule of life.

If the doctrines of the Bible had been exhibited in a detached form, so as to constitute a separate part of the word of God; and if the precepts had also been presented to our view as a

distinct section of the sacred book, some persons would have evinced a predilection for the former, to the neglect of the latter; and some would have displayed a preference of the latter, to the disparagement of the former. Such, however, is the wisdom apparent in the intimacy of connection between the one and the other, throughout the entire extent of the Holy Scriptures, that we cannot study the rule of faith without having our attention summoned to the rule of conduct; neither can we examine the rule of life, without having our views directed to the rule of faith. The doctrines and the precepts are so interwoven in the very texture of divine revelation, that nothing short of

destructive violence can effect a disruption. He, therefore, who has "believed on God will be careful to maintain good works;" and he who cherishes this solicitude, will daily search those oracles of truth which are "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and instruction in righteousness, in order that he may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." The language of his inmost soul will be,—"Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" "If," said a holy man, "in reference to any action or indulgence, the word of God says, *Thou shalt not*, a child of God says at once, *I will not*, in spite of strength of inclination, or violence of temptation. If God says, *Thou shalt*, he says, in

spite of custom, difficulty, or danger, *I will.* This is freedom; this is happiness; this is life and power from God." Can you, my friends, adopt this language as your own? Is it your prevaling desire to be able to say all this with sincerity and truth? Do you habitually resort to the word of God for practical purposes? Do you resort to it, as to the wisest of counsellors, to take advice on which you are prepared to act? Do you resort to it, as to the decisions of a judge, from whom there is no appeal? Do you greatly avail yourselves of its adaptation to be "a lamp to your feet and a light to your path?" Can you truly say,—"I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be

right; and I hate every false way?" What are they all, but amplifications in beauteous detail, adapted to all the diversified circumstances of life, of the one grand directory,—"Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God?"

Thirdly, Yield yourselves unreservedly to the directing and controlling influence of the Spirit of God.

Unless the indispensable necessity of this divine influence be kept in view, as the object of desire and prayer, all the other rules of holy living will be enforced in vain. "They that are in the flesh cannot please God; but ye," said the Apostle, "are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God

dwell in you."—"The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." By "the law of sin and death," is here, I conceive, meant, the commanding influence of evil; and, therefore, by the law of the Spirit of life, is intended, the commanding influence of that Spirit who gives the life divine. The authority, then, of the Spirit of God, in the heart in which he dwells,

is the paramount authority of law acknowledged, revered, and loved. He there erects his throne, asserts his dominion, and maintains his ascendency. He exerts a sanctifying influence over the thoughts, the desires, the dispositions, and the affections of the soul. He works in the believer "both to will and to do, according to his own good pleasure;" and thus is fulfilled that righteousness which the law of God requires, but which unaided man would never be qualified to attain. If, then, it be our desire, that our conduct should be governed by the law of God, so that "whatever we do, we may do all to his glory," we must yield ourselves unreservedly to the guidance

and government of the Spirit of God. Let every Christian be prepared to say from the heart:—"Lead me and guide me, O Spirit of light and life, into all the truth I am required to believe, and into all the paths of righteousness in which I am required to walk. Most gratefully and dutifully would I yield myself to thy commanding influence. Reign in my heart as on thy throne. Dwell in my soul as in thy temple. Sanctify, elevate, sustain my energies of thought and feeling. "Work in me all the good pleasure of thy goodness,and the work of faith with power."

Fourthly, Let there be a diligent improvement of every talent committed to your trust.

I need not now enter on any minute

specification of the various orders of talents, respecting every one of which, the Lord and Master has said,—"Occupy till I come."

Time is a talent of inestimable value, not to be wasted by indolent repose, not to be lavished on unprofitable pursuits, not to be consumed on mere amusement, not to be lost by delusive procrastination. "Let me never delay any thing," said Dr. Doddridge, "unless I can prove that another time will be more fit than the present, or that some more important duty requires my immediate attention. Let me never lose one minute of time."

"Time wasted is existence; used is life!
————Pay
No moment, but in purchase of its worth."

Property is a talent, capable of effecting extensive good, and involving a serious and fearful responsibility. Never was there a period, since the days of the Apostles, in which the demands for the employment of this talent were more numerous, or more imperative, than at the present day; and never was there a period more distinguished by facilities for rendering its employment productive of advantage. An account of our stewardship is soon to be required. Will it then appear, that we have been "providing bags which wax not old; a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth?"

Opportunities of doing good, of what-

ever kind, are talents; and they are an order of talents intrusted, in a greater or less degree, to every one of us, according to the sphere in which we severally move. It is an assertion equally correct and important,—that "opportunity to do good, constitutes an obligation to enter on the performance." This sentiment was so intimately incorporated with the moral feelings of the excellent Dr. Cotton Mather, that he was accustomed, previously to his entering on the engagements of every day, to inquire what opportunities of doing good he had reason to anticipate. His habitual inquiries were such as these: "What have I to do, for the interests of God, in my own heart and life?

What shall I do for the good of my family? What shall I do, for the good of the flock under my charge? What good may I do, in the several societies to which I belong? What shall I do, for the general interests of religion in the world?" Let the spirit of these inquiries be imbibed by us, and let the principles on which they proceed be the principles of our conduct; and beyond all doubt we shall find, that the most useful life is at the same time the most happy.

Fifthly, Let there be an habitual solicitude to guard against every thing which would bring reproach upon your Christian profession.

I am presuming that there is Christian *profession* as well as Christian

principle. Unless there be, how can there be given satisfactory evidence of a sincere and prevailing desire to live to the glory of God? Not more explicitly are we required,—"with the heart to believe unto righteousness," than "with the mouth to make confession unto salvation." *That very confession*, if unequivocal, uniform, and consistent, is one of the most direct methods of giving glory to our God and Saviour. "Whosoever," said the Saviour, "shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father who is in heaven;—but whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's,

and of the holy angels." And will he be less ashamed of the man who, in words, confessed him, but in works denied him? Can that profession be available or acceptable, which is falsified by actions, or neutralized by the spirit and the love of this present world? O, of what incalculable importance is it, that "every one who nameth the name of Christ should depart from iniquity;" and that every one who contends for the faith once delivered to the saints, should "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things!" Can you calculate the evils which have arisen from the conduct of those professors of religion who have proved themselves to be, in reality, the bitterest enemies of the

cross of Christ? Can you estimate the influence or the extent of the prejudices they have created, the scepticism they have encouraged, the persecution they have awakened, and the aid they have rendered to the cause of the tempter and the destroyer? Be it then your solicitude, my Christian brethren, that "your light may so shine before men, that they, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father who is in heaven." Be it your concern to "do justly, and to love mercy," as well as "to walk humbly with your God." Let these essential duties of Christian obedience be conjoined in constant and inseparable alliance. Let it never be said, that you are deficient in the principles

or in the practice of justice, in your secular transactions, while aspiring to the praise of Christian benevolence, or of exalted piety. Let it not be in the power, either of any Christian brother, or of any man of the world, to say, that you have injured him, in his fortune, or in his fame, or even in his feelings. On the contrary, "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

Lastly, In the entire conduct of life, let there be a constant reference to death and to eternity.

"Let me remember," said the pious Doddridge, "that, through the mercy of God in a Redeemer, I hope I am within a few days of heaven!" Among the resolutions of President Edwards were the following.—

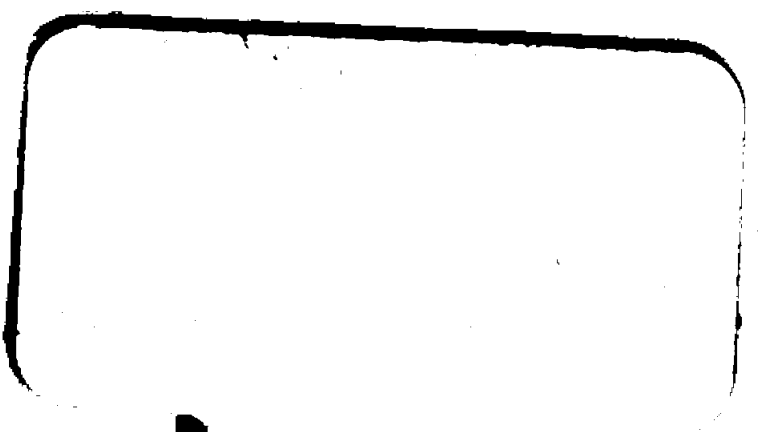
"Resolved; never to do any thing which I should be afraid to do, if it were the last hour of my life."

"Resolved; to think much, on all occasions, of my own dying, and of the common circumstances which attend death."

"Resolved; that I will live so as I shall wish I had done, when I come to die. I frequently hear persons, in old age, say, how they would live, if they were to live their lives over again:—Resolved; that I will live

just so, as I can think I shall wish I had done, supposing I live to old age."

"Resolved; to endeavor, to my utmost, to act as I can think I should do, if I had already seen the happiness of heaven, and the torments of hell."

Let such resolutions be ours! Never, indeed, let us make them in our own strength, but in reliance on the promised aid of that Holy Spirit, who can "strengthen us with all might in the inner man." Let us not think it sufficient to resolve; but let us habitually enter on the work of self-examination, in order to ascertain whether these resolutions have been carried into effect. Let us not only review

our conduct, but let us also scrutinize our hearts; and that we may effectually guard against the danger of self-deception, let our prayer ever be:—"Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."